

AN ARGUMENT IN THE KITCHEN

A PLAYLET FOR CHILDREN IN ONE ACT

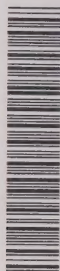
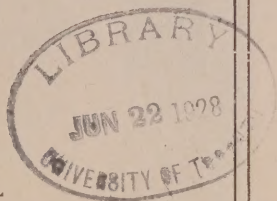
BY

HELEN G. CAMPBELL

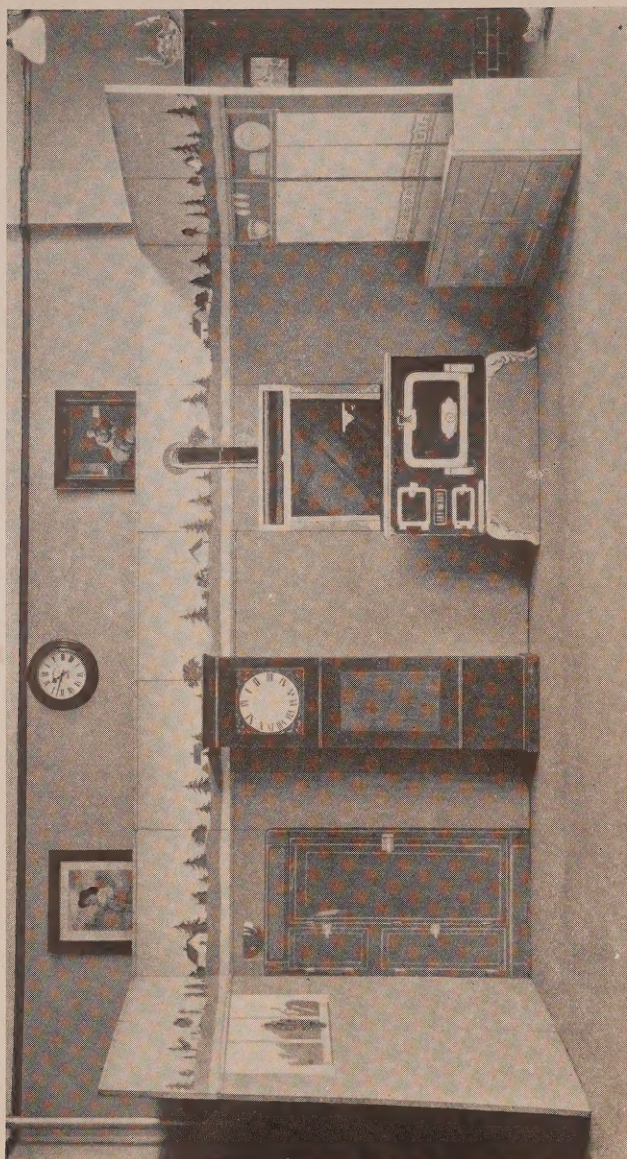
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BACKGROUND USED BY DAIRY BRANCH, DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

It is constructed of beaverboard tinted buff shade. Window, refrigerator, top of stove and cupboard and curtain are painted on the background. Clock, body of stove and bottom of cupboard are made of wood, painted as shown in photograph. Body of stove is supported by brace about 18 inches from wall; bottom of cupboard is placed about 12 inches (the width of the end board) from wall to allow children to stand behind them. The door of the refrigerator is made on hinges and opens to allow entrance of "Mrs. Milk Bottle" and fairies.

AN ARGUMENT IN THE KITCHEN

A PLAYLET FOR CHILDREN IN ONE ACT

By HELEN G. CAMPBELL,

Dairy Branch, Department of Agriculture, Ottawa

CHARACTERS

Betty	Mr. Pepper
Betty's Mother	Mrs. Teapot
Mr. Kitchen Clock	Fairies:
Mr. Pickle Jar	Butterfat
Mrs. Porridge Pot	Sugar
Mrs. Coffee Pot	Protein
Mrs. Milk Bottle	Lime
Mrs. Sugar Bowl	Vitamins (3)
Mr. Soup Kettle	Sprites:
Mrs. Candy Box	Caffeine
Miss Salt	Tannin

SCENE—An ordinary well-appointed kitchen—stove at centre back of stage, shelf at right, higher shelf at left back, refrigerator at left, table at right, door at upper left, arm-chair about centre front.

The curtain rises on the kitchen folk—Mrs. Porridge Pot and Mr. Soup Kettle beside stove; Mrs. Teapot, Miss Salt and Mr. Pepper together at right in front of shelf; Kitchen Clock on higher shelf; Mrs. Candy Box and Mrs. Sugar Bowl at right near table; Mr. Pickle Jar upstage.

NOTE.—*The above suggestions are given for use when real furniture is used.*

(Voices off stage)

BETTY—Mother, may I have a cup of coffee instead of milk with my lunch to-day? Susie Smith who sits behind me in school drinks coffee every day. She said this morning that only babies drink milk.

MOTHER—But you remember you told me last week that Susie is one of those little girls who are so much underweight. I want my little girl to be well and strong and that's why I want you to drink milk and follow all those health rules teacher tells you about.

BETTY—But could I have coffee just this once?

MOTHER—No, Betty. Coffee's not good for children—not even a taste. Now you've finished your lunch, you have time for a rest before starting back to school.

BETTY—All right, Mother. I'll sit in the big chair 'in the kitchen.

(Betty comes into kitchen and sits in chair—settles comfortably.)

BETTY—(Drowsily) My! It's so nice and warm here—I'm sleepy as can be.

MOTHER—Well, take a little nap, dear. Sweet dreams!

Mr. KITCHEN CLOCK (peeking out from behind clock)—Well, Betty is asleep already. I hope she dreams of the Kitchen People for a change. I wonder if these Human Beings ever realize how interested we are in them.

Mr. PICKLE JAR—Are they indeed, Mr. Kitchen Clock? You see, my name is Mr. Pickle Jar and I do not visit in the kitchen very often so I do not know the kitchen people very well.

Mr. KITCHEN CLOCK—Why, yes, we are all very fond of the family and we all try very hard to please them. Some of us are very jealous of what Betty's Mother thinks of us, and Mrs. Milk Bottle and Mrs. Coffee Pot are forever arguing as to which one does the most good.

Mr. PICKLE JAR—Mrs. Milk Bottle and Mrs. Coffee Pot! I don't know those ladies. They have not come in yet? Perhaps they are together somewhere.

Mr. KITCHEN CLOCK—Oh, dear me, no! Mrs. Milk Bottle and Mrs. Coffee Pot are not very good friends. They do not meet very often for they live in different localities. Mrs. Milk Bottle lives on Refrigerator Street. She prefers that neighbourhood to any other for the climate suits her better. Mrs. Milk Bottle says it is very bad for her to live anywhere but the coldest spot she can find.

Mr. PICKLE JAR—Who is this Mrs. Milk Bottle?

Mr. KITCHEN CLOCK—Mrs. Milk Bottle is quite an important personage here. I'am very fond of her, but like everybody else she has her peculiarities. For one thing, she always wears a hat in the house. If she has her way, she changes her travelling hat of cardboard as soon as she comes into the house and puts on one of those glass or aluminium ones. She takes a lot of pride in her appearance.

Mr. PICKLE JAR—And what about Mrs. Coffee Pot? Where does she live?

Mr. KITCHEN CLOCK—Mrs. Coffee Pot is particular about her looks, too. She lives on Pantry Row, near her neighbours, Miss Salt and Mr. Pepper, who Mrs. Matchbox says are seen together a good deal.

(Mrs. Milk Bottle and Mrs. Coffee Pot enter from opposite sides.)

Mrs. PORRIDGE POT—Here's Mrs. Coffee Pot now—and here's Mrs. Milk Bottle.

Mrs. COFFEE POT—Good morning, Kitchen People. My, this is a cold place.

Mrs. MILK BOTTLE—Oh, you are so particular! You always like such a warm place.

Mrs. COFFEE POT—Well, I'm not like you, turn sour when I'm left in a warm place for a little while. Warmth improves my disposition. You always talk about being kept "Clean, cold and covered."

Mrs. MILK BOTTLE—You are rather particular yourself about being kept clean and shiny.

Mrs. COFFEE POT—Well, anyway, I am satisfied with that. You like to be dressed up with a glass or aluminium head-dress; I suppose you think the cardboard one is not becoming to you.

Mrs. MILK BOTTLE—Well, I've very important work to do and I can do my work better when people keep me clean and cold, and—

Mrs. SUGAR BOWL (Interrupting)—Yes, but sometimes Betty seems to like Mrs. Coffee Pot best. Do you remember this morning, she asked for coffee instead of milk?

Mrs. MILK BOTTLE—But her mother said coffee was not good for children.

Mrs. COFFEE POT (angry at what Betty's mother said about her)—I am just as good as some other folks I know here.

Mrs. MILK BOTTLE—Oh, you are, are you? Well, perhaps you will tell what good you do.

Mrs. COFFEE POT—I am very fond of the family.

Mrs. MILK BOTTLE—Oh, yes, you pretend to be fond of the family. Dear knows, you should be, for you are kept shiny and clean and are well looked after, but I don't believe you repay the kindness shown you except by giving to grown-up people a drink of good flavour.

Mrs. COFFEE POT—I suppose you have been listening to that cousin of yours, Mrs. Cream Jug. She always thinks she is so necessary. 'It's true she is a great help to me, but many people prefer not to have her accompany me.

Mr. KITCHEN CLOCK (stepping out from behind clock)—Now, now, my friends, do not let us squabble. Let us hold a Court and decide this question once and for all. Lend your ear, good people, and let us hear the statements of the parties to the suit. We will now see which of them gives most to little Betty.

Mr. KITCHEN CLOCK (continuing)—Now, Mrs. Milk Bottle, what have you to say?

Mrs. MILK BOTTLE—Judge Kitchen Clock, I claim I am the best friend of babies, boys and girls and even grown-up people, too; especially when they are sick. I put roses in children's cheeks and make them healthy and happy. The Good Health Fairies have blessed what I have to give them.

Mr. KITCHEN CLOCK—We will hear what the Good Health Fairies have to say.

(Enter Butterfat Fairy, who takes Mrs. Milk Bottle by the hand.)

BUTTERFAT FAIRY—I am Fairy Butterfat of the Tribe of Good Health Fairies and I help Mrs. Milk Bottle.

Mr. KITCHEN CLOCK—Oh yes—I have heard of you. They say you are Mrs. Milk Bottle's favourite fairy.

BUTTERFAT FAIRY—Why no! She is just as fond of the other fairies. Folks always see me first, though, because I am so hard to keep down.

Mr. KITCHEN CLOCK—Do you bless the milk which Mrs. Milk Bottle gives boys and girls?

BUTTERFAT FAIRY—Why, of course. I make milk taste better, and more than that, I keep boys and girls warm and make them grow.

Mr. KITCHEN CLOCK—Have you any little sisters or brothers who help Mrs. Milk Bottle?

BUTTERFAT FAIRY—Oh, yes, little Sugar Fairy helps Mrs. Milk Bottle and she loves little children. She is so sweet almost everybody loves her.

Mr. KITCHEN CLOCK—Call Sugar Fairy.

(Butterfat calls Sugar Fairy.)

SUGAR FAIRY (entering)—I'm not very big but I love little children. They love me, too. I help folks keep warm; and milk, which Mrs. Milk Bottle gives, is a food I have blessed.

Mr. KITCHEN CLOCK—And what else do you do, little maid?

SUGAR FAIRY—I also bless Mrs. Sugar Bowl and Mrs. Candy Box, too (pointing to each in turn); but if I could write, I'd hang a sign on both—“*Take in Small Doses.*”

Mrs. SUGAR BOWL and Mrs. CANDY BOX (both together)—Oh, that would not be nice. Little children just love us and always want us.

Mr. KITCHEN CLOCK—Order! Sugar Fairy is giving evidence.

SUGAR FAIRY—You know, Judge Kitchen Clock, when little children want too much of my company, I begin to spoil their teeth and sometimes even make them sick. I don't do it to be mean, I just can't help it.

(Sugar Fairy takes signs and hangs them on Mrs. Sugar Bowl and Mrs. Candy Box. Mrs. Sugar Bowl and Mrs. Candy Box hang heads and look rather ashamed.)

Mr. KITCHEN CLOCK—Is there any other little fairy wishing to speak?

PROTEIN FAIRY (entering)—Yes, I'm Protein Fairy. I build muscle to make people strong. Boys who eat what I bless can play football—and baseball—and hockey.

Mr. KITCHEN CLOCK—And little girls—what can they do when they eat the food you bless?

PROTEIN FAIRY—Little girls can run fast and jump far. They can also do a great deal to help Mother. I can work best when boys and girls drink about three glasses of milk every day.

Mr. KITCHEN CLOCK—Call the next witness.

Mrs. MILK BOTTLE—Come, Lime Fairy.

LIME FAIRY (entering)—I help Mrs. Milk Bottle, too. I make teeth—good, white, firm teeth—and children can have the teeth I make “for keeps” if they take good care of them. I build bones, too.

Mr. KITCHEN CLOCK—And what foods have you blessed, little builder?

LIME FAIRY—Milk is my favourite. I put into milk more of the material to build teeth and bones than I put in any other food. Children who drink it can depend on me.

Mr. KITCHEN CLOCK—Are there any more witnesses?

VITAMIN FAIRIES (entering all together, hands clasped)—We are called Vitamins. We always go along with milk which Mrs. Milk Bottle gives and we love it best of all the foods because we're not all together in any other. We love Mrs. Milk Bottle. We are not very well known but we do a great deal of good and no boy or girl could grow or be well and strong without us.

(All the fairies join hands and dance in ring, singing to the tune of “London Bridge is Falling down”):

We're the Good Health Fairies, Fairies, Fairies,
We're the Good Health Fairies, we *work* for children.

We make good food for boys and girls, boys and girls, boys
and girls,

We make good food for boys and girls and *make* them happy.

We love one food the best of all, best of all, best of all,
We won't tell you that food's name, we'll *spell* it for you.

(Fairies form the word M-I-L-K.) See footnotes 1 and 2; also illustration on page 16.

KITCHEN PEOPLE (all together)—Milk!

Mr. KITCHEN CLOCK—Has anyone else here anything to say in favour of Mrs. Milk Bottle? Have *you*, Mrs. Porridge Pot?

Mrs. PORRIDGE POT—Yes, indeed, Judge. I have something especially good for children but I always have to depend on my friend, Mrs. Milk Bottle, to help me.

Mr. KITCHEN CLOCK—And *you*, Mr. Soup Kettle—what have you to say?

Mr. SOUP KETTLE—I give something good too, and I always know that if Mrs. Milk Bottle helps me with a soup for the family, it is a food I can be proud to give.

Mr. KITCHEN CLOCK—Yes, I guess Mrs. Milk Bottle does give a good deal to little Betty. All these witnesses are great friends of mine. Now, Mrs. Coffee Pot, let us hear what you have to say. Please tell the kitchen folk here what you can do for boys and girls.

(Mrs. Coffee Pot hangs head, looking ashamed—sulks.)

Mr. KITCHEN CLOCK—Come, come! Haven't you any fairies to speak for you?

CAFFEINE (coming from behind Mrs. Coffee Pot)—I'm not a fairy. I'm a mischievous sprite called Caffeine. I make coffee harmful for children. None of the Good Health Fairies will have anything to do with me. My best friend is Cousin Tannin who does the same to tea as I do to coffee.

(Tannin peers from behind Mrs. Teapot on hearing his name mentioned by Caffeine.)

Mr. KITCHEN CLOCK—Has anyone something to say in favour of Mrs. Coffee Pot? (Deep silence.) Now what is the decision?

¹ A better arrangement, if possible, is to have seven extra children, dressed in plain black or white suits, form the word as shown in photograph on page 16. If this is done, it is a good plan to sew a narrow strip of contrasting colour on the costume—for instance, for the letter "M" sew the strip from neck to hem and along arm from neck to hand.

² If space is limited, it is effective to have the Fairies spell the word "M-I-L-K" slowly and distinctly.

(All kitchen people with exception of Mr. Kitchen Clock, Mrs. Coffee Pot and Mrs. Milk Bottle consult together.)

MR. PICKLE JAR—Well, I guess this is no place for me. What I give isn't good for children.

(Mr. Pickle Jar tiptoes around the group and when he gets near the door makes a dash through it and away.)

MRS. PORRIDGE POT (announcing verdict to Mr. Kitchen Clock)—The decision of this assembly is that Mrs. Milk Bottle is by far the more valuable of the two parties to the suit.

MR. KITCHEN CLOCK—You have heard the verdict. (Pointing to Mrs. Coffee Pot)—For punishment, I am going to forbid you to have anything to do with Miss Betty and all other growing girls and boys.

(Fairies clap their hands. Mrs. Porridge Pot and Mr. Soup Kettle say "hear, hear," and nod approvingly.)

(Mrs. Coffee Pot stamps her foot and cries in anger.)

(Mr. Kitchen Clock returns to place behind clock, points one hand of clock to one, the other to twelve and beats once on small drum or pan.)

MOTHER (coming into kitchen)—One o'clock! (Wakens Betty.) Time to go back to school, dear.

BETTY (Stretches and yawns, then wakens suddenly)—Oh, Mother, I had the funniest dream. All the pots and pans were people. . . . They talked, Mother! . . . And Mrs. Milk Bottle and Mrs. Coffee Pot were quarrelling about what they did for me. . . . And they had a Court and there were fairies. . . . And Mrs. Milk Bottle was so nice and so kind and all the fairies belonged to her. . . . Mrs. Coffee Pot didn't have any fairies—just a horrid sprite who makes coffee bad for girls and boys. I'm not going to taste coffee—or tea—till I'm grown up anyway. I'm going to drink Milk every day.

MOTHER—I'm glad of that, Betty. We're going to have *hot milk soup* for supper.

BETTY—Oh, goody, goody! Make a lot, please, Mother—I'll have a good appetite.

(Betty dances out of kitchen to go to school.)

MOTHER (laughs and says to herself)—It's fortunate Betty had that dream. There's nothing like Milk for growing children.

(Curtain falls.)

COSTUMES

- BETTY—Little girl dressed in school clothes.
- MRS. MILK BOTTLE—White cardboard shaped like a milk bottle.
- MRS. COFFEE POT—Cardboard shaped as a coffee pot and painted with aluminum paint.
- MR. KITCHEN CLOCK—Black sateen costume, similar to Father Time or a Judge.
- MRS. PORRIDGE POT—Cardboard shaped and painted to resemble double boiler (light blue stippled with white.)
- MR. SOUP KETTLE—Cardboard shaped and painted to resemble large saucepan (light blue stippled with white).
- MISS SALT and MR. PEPPER—Cardboard shaped and painted to resemble salt and pepper shakers, flat cardboard hats with black dots to resemble openings for salt and pepper.
- MR. PICKLE JAR—Cardboard shaped and painted to resemble pickle jar, cap of lead-foil to resemble cover of pickle jar.
- MRS. TEAPOT—Cardboard shaped and painted brown to resemble Brown Betty teapot.
- MRS. SUGAR BOWL—Cardboard shaped as sugar bowl and painted white—with or without decoration.
- MRS. CANDY BOX—Cardboard shaped and painted to resemble a candy box.

Fairies

- BUTTERFAT—Yellow tights extending over feet; yellow sateen coat gathered in at waist, wired at bottom to flare well; hat of yellow cardboard or sateen in shape of pound of butter. (Yellow crepe paper may be used for this costume.)
- SUGAR—White book muslin dress with flary skirt (brushed with starch and sprinkled with "snow"), white stockings, no hat, white gauze wings trimmed with tinsel.
- PROTEIN—Long black stockings, red sateen suit with very short, full pants, short red coat, red hat. (Football togs may be used.)
- LIME—Long, dark trousers and white coat (to look like a dentist).
- VITAMINS—Three green crepe paper dresses. Bandeau of tinsel may be worn on hair.

Sprites

- CAFFEINE—Brown cotton or sateen suit, big ears.
- TANNIN—Brown or black sateen suit similar to that of Caffeine.

STAGE SETTINGS

Real furniture—stove, refrigerator, table, clock,

OR

Beaverboard painted to resemble kitchen and kitchen furniture.
Real chair.

ARRANGEMENT

The playlet may be staged with a background similar to the one used by the Dairy Branch, shown in the photograph. This allows for an easy and natural grouping of the characters. In this case, Betty and her Mother are not seen in the opening dialogue. Another arrangement is to make use of two curtains, the usual one at the front, behind which Betty and her Mother sit at the table, and a second curtain which hides the other characters until after Betty falls asleep. The playlet, however, can be put on in a schoolroom or elsewhere by arranging real furniture conveniently and placing an ordinary kitchen clock on a shelf from which a curtain is suspended to hide the character "Kitchen Clock."

While the costumes and setting are of very great importance in the effective staging of this play, it can be put on in the schoolroom very interestingly for children, by dressing the characters in plain white aprons such as are used in Home Economics classes and using cardboard labels with the names of the characters. One teacher made use of it in this way, even improvising furniture—a large black cloth covered a small table and did duty as a kitchen stove. As has been said, however, the costumes add a great deal to the attractiveness of the play and they can be made at home or in the classroom without much trouble and with very little expense.

It is sometimes possible to secure the equipment used by the Dairy Branch, Department of Agriculture, Ottawa. Anyone wishing particulars, or further suggestions as to staging the playlet, may write to this office.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

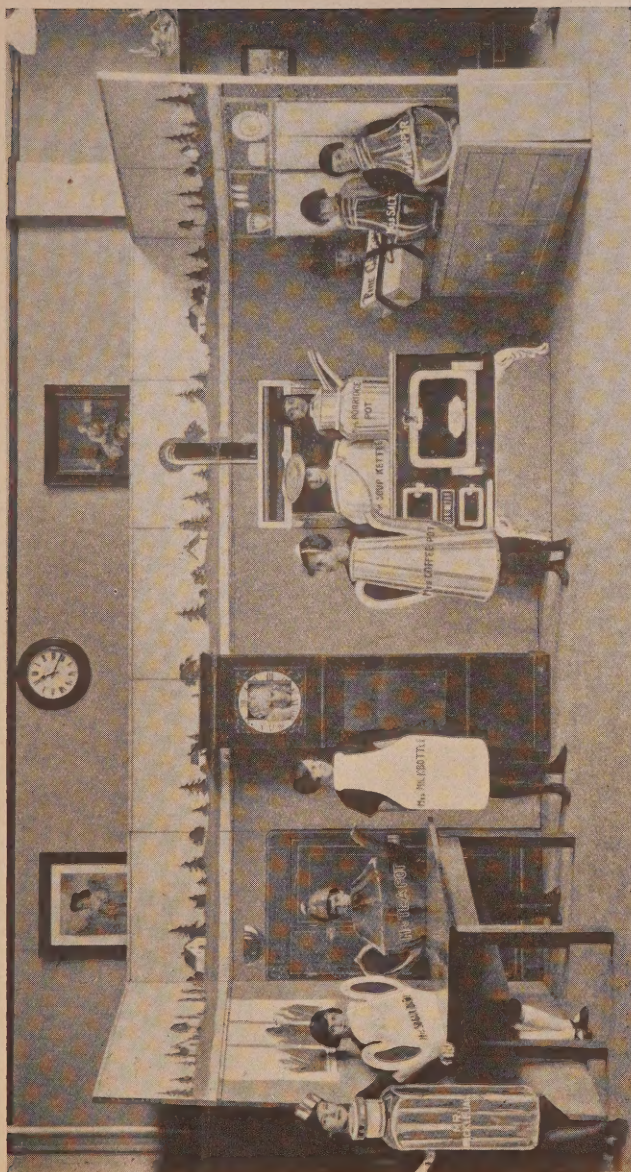
The photographs of the stage settings and characters were taken at the Borden School, Ottawa, through the courtesy of the Principal, Miss McKerracher. The children are pupils of that school.

Acknowledgment is due the Principal, teachers and pupils of the Borden School in trying out the playlet as first drafted. This was a great help in suggesting improvements in dialogue and stage arrangements and in ascertaining how children would like it.

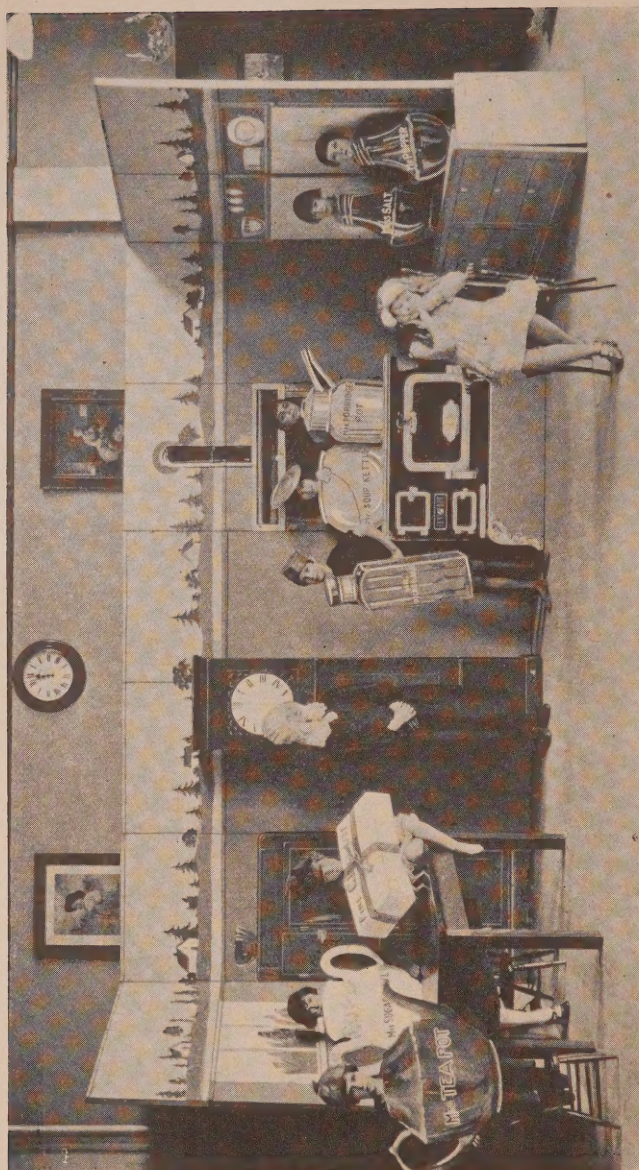


BACKGROUND WITH CHARACTERS IN PLACE

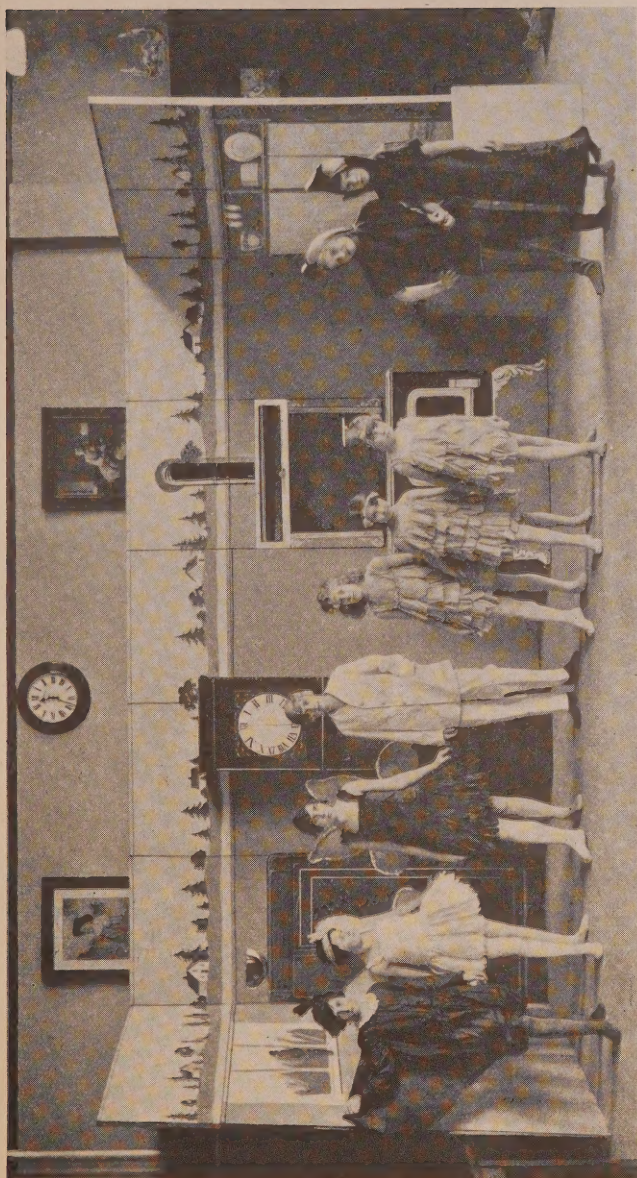
NORR. --In the play, Betty is asleep in chair in foreground. This is omitted from the photograph in order not to hide the other characters.



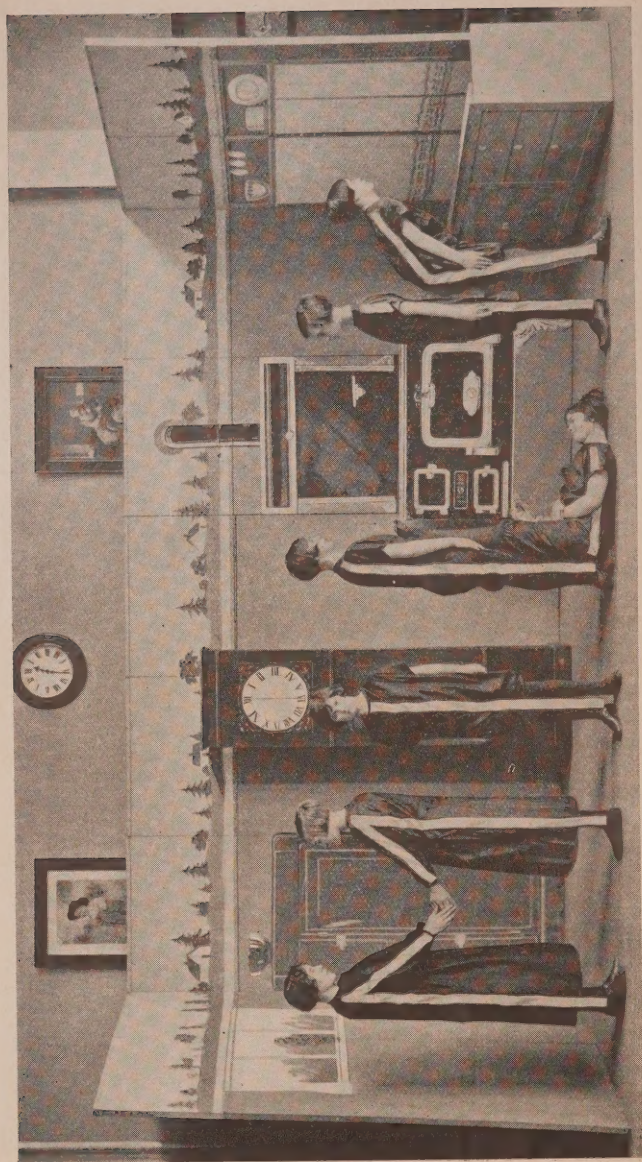
MRS. MILK BOTTLE AND MRS. COFFEE POT APPEAR ON THE SCENE



BETTY ASLEEP



THE FAIRIES AND SPRITES



FORMING THE WORD MILK (M-I-L-K)